

INSECT-EATING PLANTS AND HOW TO GROW THEM

By Adrian Slack
Alpha Books 1986

Reviewed by Peter D'Amato

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It is truly difficult to find fault with a book as marvelous as this, a publication carnivorous plant enthusiasts have long been waiting for. Many hobbyists have considered Mr. Slack's 1979 *Carnivorous Plants* their "bible", but this book, already out for a few years and still rare in some countries, renders pages of previous horticultural supplements found in other CP books obsolete. Mr. Slack has composed a neat and tidy little book, bursting at the seams with information. It should reign number one among the shelves of collectors for quite some time to come.

Of course the thrill of *Insect-Eating Plants* is the subtitle *And How To Grow Them*. As Mr. Slack explains in his introduction, his first book was a biology of CP, while this publication is dedicated solely to their culture. The author passes on vast information on hundreds of varieties now in cultivation from many seasoned growers from around the world, including his own quarter of a century of experience. Mr. Slack's love of these plants leaps out at you, and his engaging style is captivating from the start. The book is well organized, to the point, colorful, and fun to read.

There are over 60 pages of photographs in this volume, all in color and many by Slack himself. Most are startling in their beauty, and offer visual feats of rare CP such as: Please see **PLANTS** on page 126.

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PLANTS continued from page 125.

Sarracenia X 'Daniel Rudd', one of the author's many creations and considered his favorite; Robert Cantley's haunting "*Nepenthes rajah* with frog"; *Sarracenia flava* 'Burgundy'. Slack's own line drawings are a handsome addition, particularly of the *Nepenthes*.

Perhaps the most accomplished feat of Mr. Slack is the transformation of the carnivorous plant hobby from an obscure and curious novelty to a mature horticultural art form. If Slack has his way, no longer will CP be confined to black plastic pots hidden in greenhouses: they will boldly decorate household windowsills, add color and intrigue to the garden, and find their status elevated to the heights of the African Violet, as Slack confidently predicts for the *Pinguicula*. His designs of outdoor bog gardens are clever, and the decorating of pots of sundews with tufa rock, for example, show taste and creativity. His seriousness shows a much needed discipline in the world of CP, as when he claims "that, as with the rose, the horticultural future of *Sarracenia* lies mainly with hybrids", or his belief that only one of perhaps 3000 hybrid seedlings might be elevated to the status of cultivar. His opinions punctuate the text often amusingly in that already familiar Slack style: "... and the unspeakable-sounding and unspeakable-looking *S. X umlaufiana* . . ." Indeed! He attempts to clear up some misconceptions as well, as in the cultivars *S. flava* 'Maxima' and *S. X willissii*.

There are a few typographical errors, but even these are overshadowed by the attractive format of the book. While Slack complains of lack of space limiting his description of *Sarracenia* hybrids, more than half a page is left stark blank at the end of the section, where much desired text could easily fit. A nice addition would have been some more words on public displays, flower shows, and societies, for this is how the hobby gains recognition. And why didn't the author or publisher advertise the publication of this fine volume in, for example, CPN? There has also been some confusion on where to order the book.

Nonetheless, no enthusiast will be disappointed in this little gem, and as the hobby grows, one hopes we can look forward to future volumes on even more detailed subjects by Mr. Slack, such as a book exclusively on the sundews and butterworts, or one fully dedicated to the pitcher plants. So it was with pleasure to hear that *Drosera* 'Highland Red', a sundew discovered by Frank Woodvine and popularized by Slack in this book and through his Marston Exotics, was named by Martin Cheek in his description of the plant as *D. slackii*, a nice compliment to a man who has done so much in the popularization of these wonderful plants. This book is still available from:

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